AMENDED & MARKE

Speech Recognition and Signal Analysis by Exact Fast Search of Subsequences with Maximal Confidence Measure

SPECIFICATION

1 TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Speech Recognition and Signal Analysis by Exact Fast Search of Subsequences with Maximal Confidence Measure

2 REFERENCE TO APPENDIX SUBMITTED ON CD

Not Applicable

3 CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This patent application has as parent application the patent application C99-00214/25.02.1999 registered with the State Office for Inventions and Trademarks (OSIM) in Bucharest, Romania. The present application is the US national stage of the international application PCT/IB00/00189 registered with the International Patent Office in Geneva.

4 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

4.1 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a common component of:

- Speech Recognition, more particularly to the fields of Keyword Spotting and decoding,
- Segments Alignment for DNA and proteins,
- Recognition of Objects in Images,

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

This invention addresses the problem of *keyword spotting (KWS)* in unconstrained speech without explicit modeling of non-keyword segments (typically done by using filler HMM models or an ergodic HMM composed of context dependent or independent phone models without lexical constraints). Several methods (sometimes referred to as "sliding model methods") tackling this type of problem have already been proposed in the past. E.g., they use Dynamic Time Warping (DTW) or Viterbi matching allowing relaxation of the (begin and endpoint) constraints. These are known to require the use of an "appropriate" normalization of the matching scores since segments of different lengths have then to be compared. However, given this normalization and the relaxation of begin/endpoints, straightforward Dynamic Programming (DP) is no longer optimal (or, in other words, the DP optimality principle is no longer valid) and has to be adapted, involving more memory and CPU. Indeed, at any possible ending time e, the match score of the best warp and start time b of the reference has to be computed (for all possible start times b associated with unpruned paths). Finally, this adapted DP quickly becomes even more complex (or intractable) for more advanced scoring criteria (such as the confidence measures mentioned below).

Work in the field of confidence level, and in the framework of hybrid HMM/ANN systems has shown that the use of accumulated local posterior probabilities (as obtained at the output of a multilayer perceptron) normalized by the length of the word segment (or, better, involving a double normalization over the number of phones and the number of acoustic frames in each phone) was yielding good confidence measures and good scores for the re-estimation of N-best hypotheses. However, so far the evaluation of such confidence measures involved the estimation.and rescoring of N-best hypotheses.

KWS methods without filler models have in common the selection of a subsequence of the utterance to match the interesting keyword models. Let $X = \{x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n, \ldots, x_N\}$ denote the sequence of acoustic vectors in which we want to detect a keyword, and let M be the HMM model of a keyword M and consisting of L states $Q = \{q_1, q_2, \ldots, q_\ell, \ldots, q_L\}$. Assuming that M is matched to a subsequence $X_b^e = \{x_b, \ldots, x_e\}$ $(1 \leq b \leq e \leq N)$ of X, and that we have an implicit (not modeled) *garbage/filler state* q_G preceding and following M, one can define (approximate) the log posterior of a model M given a subsequence X_b^e as the average posterior probability along the optimal path, i.e.:

$$\begin{aligned} -\log P(M|X_b^e) &\simeq \frac{1}{e-b+1} \min_{\forall Q \in M} -\log P(Q|X_b^e) \\ &\simeq \frac{1}{e-b+1} \min_{\forall Q \in M} \{-\log P(q^b|q_G) \\ &\quad -\sum_{n=b}^{e-1} [\log P(q^n|x_n) + \log P(q^{n+1}|q^n)] \\ &\quad -\log P(q^e|x_e) - \log P(q_G|q^e)\} \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where $Q = \{q^b, q^{b+1}, ..., q^e\}$ represents one of the possible paths of length $(e-b+1)$ in M, and

q^n the HMM state visited at time n along Q, with $q^n \in Q$. In this expression, q_G represents the "garbage" (filler) state which is simply used here as the non-emitting initial and final state of M. Transition probabilities $P(q^b|q_G)$ and $P(q_G|q^e)$ can be interpreted as the keyword entrance and exit penalties, but can be simply set to 1. Local posteriors $P(q_\ell|x_n)$ can be estimated using any of the known techniques: multi-gaussians, code-books, or as output values of a multilayer perceptron (MLP) used in hybrid HMM/ANN systems. For a specific sub-sequence X_b^e, expression (1) can easily be estimated by dynamic programming since the sub-sequence and the associated normalizing factor $(e - b + 1)$ are given. However, in the case of keyword spotting, this expression should be estimated for all possible begin/endpoint pairs $\{b, e\}$ (as well as for all possible word models), and we define the matching score of X on M as:

$$S(M|X) = -\log P(M|X_{b^*}^{e^*}) \tag{2}$$

where the optimal begin/endpoints $\{b^*, e^*\}$, and the associated optimal path Q^*, are the ones yielding the lowest average local posterior:

$$\langle Q^*, b^*, e^* \rangle = \operatorname*{argmin}_{\{Q,b,e\}} \frac{-1}{e-b+1} \log P(Q|X_b^e) \tag{3}$$

Of course, in the case of several keywords, all possible models will have to be evaluated.

A double averaging involving the number of frames per phone and the number of phones usually yields slightly better performance when used to rescore N-best candidates:

$$\langle Q^*, b^*, e^* \rangle = \tag{4}$$

$$\operatorname*{argmin}_{\{Q,b,e\}} \frac{-1}{J} \sum_{j=1}^{J} \left(\frac{1}{e_j - b_j + 1} \sum_{n=b_j}^{e_j} \log P(q_j^n|x_n) \right) \mathit{nonumber} \tag{5}$$

where J represents the number of phones in the hypothesized keyword model and q_j^n the hypothesized phone q_j for input frame x_n. However, given the time normalization and the relaxation of begin/endpoints, straightforward DP is no longer optimal and has to be adapted, usually involving more memory and CPU.

Filler-based KWS need a simpler decoding step. Although various solutions have been proposed towards the direct optimization of (2), most of the keyword spotting approaches today prefer to preserve the optimality and simplicity of Viterbi DP by modeling the complete input and explicitly or implicitly modeling non-keyword segments by using so called filler or garbage models as additional reference models. In this case, we assume that non-keyword segments are modeled by extraneous garbage models/states q_G (and grammatical constraints ruling the possible keyword/non-keyword sequences).

[It is sufficient to consider only the case of detecting one keyword] *Let us consider only the case of detecting one keyword* per utterance at a time. In this case, the keyword spotting problem amounts at matching the whole sequence X of length N onto an extended HMM model $\overline{M}$ consisting of the states $\{q_G, q_1, \ldots, q_L, q_G\}$, in which a path (of length N) is denoted $\overline{Q} = \{\overbrace{q_G, ...q_G}^{b-1}, q^b, q^{b+1}, ..., q^e, \overbrace{q_G, ...q_G}^{N-e}\}$ with $(b-1)$ garbage states q_G preceding q^b and $(N-e)$ states q_G following q^e, and respectively emitting the vector sequences X_1^{b-1} and X_{e+1}^N associated with the non-keyword segments.

Given some estimation of $P(q_G|x_n)$ (e.g., using probability density functions trained on non keyword utterances), the optimal path $\overline{Q^*}$ (and, consequently b^* and e^*) is then given by:

$$\overline{Q^*} = \underset{\forall \overline{Q} \in \overline{M}}{\operatorname{argmin}} - \log P(\overline{Q}|X)$$

$$= \underset{\forall \overline{Q} \in \overline{M}}{\operatorname{argmin}} \{ - \log P(Q|X_b^e)$$

$$-\sum_{n=1}^{b-1}\log P(q_G|x_n) - \sum_{n=e+1}^{N}\log P(q_G|x_n)\} \qquad (6)$$

which can be solved by straightforward DP (since all paths have the same length). The main problem of filler-based keyword spotting approaches is then to find ways to best estimate $P(q_G|x_n)$ in order to minimize the error introduced by the approximations. Sometimes this value was defined as the average of the N best local scores while, in other approaches, this value is generated from explicit filler HMMs. However, these approaches will usually not lead to the "optimal" solution given by (2).

5 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention belongs to the technical domain of decoding, classification, alignment and matching of data.

The invention introduces a new method performing tasks in keyword spotting in utterances, detection of subsequences in chains of organic matter (DNA and proteins) and recognition of objects in images. The proposed methods search in an optimized way the matching that maximizes, over all the possible matchings, certain confidence measures based on normalized posteriors. Three such confidence measures are used, two existed in previous work in Speech Recognition, and the third one is a new one.

Application fields for this invention are: man-machine interfaces (using speech recognition; ex: control systems, banking, flight services, etc), coordination systems (for industrial robots and automata) and development systems for pharmaceutic products.

6 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

Not Applicable

7 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[The present invention introduces a fast iterative method,] *In the following, we show that it is possible to define an iterative process,* referred to as *Iterating Viterbi Decoding (IVD)* with good/fast convergence properties, estimating the value of $P(q_G|x_n)$ such that straightforward DP (6) yields exactly the same segmentation (and recognition results) than (3). While the same result could be achieved through a modified DP in which all possible combinations (all possible begin/endpoints) would be taken into account, the method proposed below is much more efficient (in terms of both CPU and memory requirements).

Compared to previously devised "sliding model" methods the first method proposed here is based on:

1. A matching score defined as the average observation probability (posterior) along the most likely state sequence. It is indeed believed that local posteriors are more appropriate to the task.

2. The iteration of a Viterbi decoding algorithm, which does not require scoring for all begin/endpoints or N-best rescoring, and which can be proved to (quickly) converge to the "optimal" (from the point of view of the chosen scoring functions) solution without

requiring any specific filler models, using straightforward Viterbi alignments (similar to regular filler-based KWS, but for some versions at the cost of a few iterations).

The IVD method is based on a similar criterion as the filler based approaches (6), but rather than looking for explicit (and empirical) estimates of $P(q_G|x_n)$ we aim at mathematically estimating its value (which will be different and adapted to each utterance) such that solving (6) is equivalent to solving (3). Thus, we perform an iterative estimation of $P(q_G|x_n)$, such that the segmentation resulting of (6) is the same than what would be obtained from (3). Defining $\varepsilon_t = -\log P(q_G|x_n)$ at iteration t, the proposed method can be summarized as follows:

1. Start the first iteration, $t = 0$, from an initial value $\varepsilon_0 = \Pi$ (it is actually proven that the iterative process presented here will always converge to the same solution, in more or less cycles with the worst case upper bound of N iterations, independently of this initialization, e.g., with Π equal with a cheap estimation of the score of a "match").

   In one of the developed versions, ε_0 is initialized to $-\log$ of the maximum of the local probabilities $P(q_k|x_n)$ for each frame x_n.

   An alternative choice is to initialize ε_0 to a pre-defined threshold score, T, that expression (1) should reach to declare a keyword "matching" (see step 4 below). In this last case, if $\varepsilon_1 > \varepsilon_0$ at the first iteration, then we can (as proven) directly infer that the match will be rejected, otherwise it will be accepted.

2. Given the estimate ε_t of $P(q_G|x_n)$ at current iteration t, find the optimal path $\langle \overline{Q}_t, b_t, e_t \rangle$ according to (6) and matching the complete input.

3. Estimate the value of ε_{t+1} to be used in the next iteration as the average of the local posteriors along the optimal path Q_t (matching the $X_{b_t}^{e_t}$ resulting of (6) on the keyword model) i.e.:

$$\varepsilon_{t+1} = -\frac{1}{(e_t - b_t + 1)} \log P(Q_t | X_{b_t}^{e_t}) \qquad (7)$$

4. Increment t and return to (2) iterating until convergence is detected. If we are not interested in the optimal segmentation, this process could also be stopped as soon as it reaches a ε_{t+1} lower than a (pre-defined) minimum threshold, T, below which we can declare that a keyword has been detected.

Correctness and convergence proof of this process and generalization to other criteria, are available: each IVD iteration (from the second iteration) will decrease the value of ε_t, and the final path yields the same solution than (3). The above method has a very good experimental convergence speed (3-5 iterations in our tests). For one version of IVD (when ε_0 is initialized using the acceptance threshold, T), the detection is decided after one single step.

A version with the same effort but suboptimal results is proposed in the following paragraph. Let $T(\overline{M}, X)$ be a matrix holding the HMM emission probabilities for an utterance X whose time-frames define the columns, and where the states of the hypothesized word W define the rows. When using the standard DP, one computes for each element of the matrix $T(\overline{M}, X)$ at frame k of X and state s of $\overline{M}$ three values: S_{ks}, L_{ks} and C_{ks}, where S_{ks} corresponds to the sum of the entries on the optimal path that leads to the entry, L_{ks} holds the length of the optimal path computed so far, and C_{ks} is the estimation of the cost on the optimal expanded path. By a path leading to an entry $T(k, s)$ we mean a sequence of entries in the table T, such that there is exactly an entry for each time frame $t \leq k$. At each entry $T(k,s)$, DP selects a locally optimal path noted P_{ks}. At each step k, we consider all pairs of entries of table $T(\overline{M},X)$ of type $T(k,s)$, $T(k-1,t)$. We update for each such pair, the current cost C_{ks} (initially ∞), by comparing it with the alternative given by:

$$S_{ks} = S_{(k-1)t} - \log p(s|x_k)p(s|t)$$

$$L_{ks} = L_{(k-1)t} + 1, \forall t > 0, t \leq L$$

$$C_{ks} = \frac{S_k}{L_k} \tag{8}$$

wanting to have at step k the path P_{ks} from the paths $P_{(k-1)t}$ that minimizes C_{NL}. With DP, one will choose the P_{ks} with minimal C_{ks}.

This version can yield suboptimal results since the optimality principle is not respected by the expression 8. The optimality principle of Dynamic Programming requires that the path to the frame $k-1$ that minimizes C_{NL}, also minimizes C_{ks} for an entry at frame k of table $T(\overline{M},X)$.

Another technique that is suboptimal in time and/or quality is obtained from the previous one adopting a beam-search approach and a set of safe prunings. The Dynamic Programming can be viewed as a set of safe prunings that are applied at each entry of the DP table and has the property that only one alternative is maintained. Dynamic Programming cannot be used, since the principle of optimality is not respected. The following types of safe pruning that can be done are introduced by the present invention. Within the current invention we found a set of safe prunings as follows: we have proved that if at a frame a we have two paths P'_a and P''_a with $S''_a < S'_a$ and $L'_a < L''_a$; then at no frame $c \geq a$ will a path P''_c be forsaken for a path P'_c if $P'_a \subset P'_c$; $P''_a \subset P''_c$ and $P'_c \setminus P'_a \equiv P''_c \setminus P''_a$. We will note the order relation as $P''_a \prec P'_a$.

We have further shown that a path P’ may be safely discarded only when we know a lower cost one, P”.

$$P' \prec P'' \Rightarrow C'_k < C''_k \tag{9}$$

Thus, the method described in following method computes $S(M,X)$ and Q^* from equation (3). By ordering the set of paths, according to Equation 9, we only need to check the step (1.1) of the following method up to the eventual insertion place. The last paths are candidates for pruning in step (1.2). In order for the pruning to be acceptable, we will prune only paths that were too long on the last state. An additional counter for each path is needed for storing the state length. This counter is reset when an entry from another row is added and is incremented at each advance with a frame. The following steps detail this method for a model W and an utterance X:

a) Initialize all elements of a matrix, SetOfPaths(1..N, 1..K), to $\emptyset$

b) For all frames from 1 to N, for all states from 1 to K, for all candidates p_i in SetOfPaths(frame-1, 1..K):

  - For all p_j in SetOfPaths[frame, state], if $p_i \prec p_j$ then delete p_j (1.1), and if $p_j \prec p_i$ then continue step b) (1.2)
  - Insert p_i in SetOfPaths[frame, state]

c) Select SetOfPaths[frame, K] as the best of the candidates

The next method builds on the previous technique and is a fast procedure for maximizing a more complex confidence measure that yields better results in practice. The corresponding confidence measure is defined as:

$$\frac{1}{NVP}\sum_{h_i\in VP}\frac{\sum_{pst\in h_i}-\log(pst)}{length(h_i)} \tag{10}$$

where NVP stands for the *number of visited phonemes* and VP stands for the *set of visited phonemes.* An average is computed over all posteriors *pst* of the emission probabilities for the time frames matched to the visited phoneme h_i. The function $length(h_i)$ gives the number of time frames matched against h_i. This method uses a breath first Beam Search algorithm. It exploits a set of reduction rules and certain normalizations. For the state q_G, in this method, the logarithm of the emission posterior is equal with zero. For each frame e and for each state s, the set of paths/probabilities of having the frame e in the state s is computed as the first $\mathcal{N}$ maxima ($\mathcal{N}$ can be finite) of the confidence measure for all paths in HMM $\overline{M}$ of length e and ending in the state s. The paths that according to the reduction rules will loose the final race when compared with another already known path, will be deleted as well. Let us note a_1, p_1, l_1, respectively a_2, p_2 and l_2 the confidence measure for the previously visited phonemes, the posterior in the current phoneme and the length in the current phoneme for the path Q_1, respectively the path Q_2. The rules that can be used for the reduction of the search space by discarding a path Q_1 for a path Q_2 are in this case any of the next ones:

1. $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A > 0$, $B \leq 0$ and $L_c^2 A + L_c B + C \geq 0$

2. $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A \geq 0$, $B \geq 0$ and $C \geq 0$

3. $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A \leq 0$, $C \geq 0$ and $L^2 A + LB + C \geq 0$

4. $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A = 0$, $B < 0$ and $LB + C \geq 0$

where $A = a_1 - a_2$, $B = (a_1 - a_2)(l_1 + l_2) + p_1 - p_2$, C=$(a_1 - a_2)l_1l_2 + p_1l_2 - p_2l_1$, $L = L_{max} - \max\{l_1, l_2\}$, $L_c = -B/2A \geq 0$ and L_{max} is the maximum acceptable length for a phoneme. By discarding paths only if one of the above rules is satisfied, the optimum defined by the confidence measure with double normalization can be guaranteed, if no phone may be avoided by the HMM M. Any HMM may be decomposed in HMMs with this quality. The 4-th rule is included in the 3-rd and its test is useless if the last one was already checked. The first test, $l_2 \geq l_1$ tells us if Q_2 has chances to eliminate Q_1, otherwise we will check if Q_1 eliminates Q_2. These tests were inferred from the conditions of maintaining the final maximal confidence measure while reduction takes place. In order to use the method of double normalization without decomposing HMMs that skip some phonemes, the previous rules are modified taking into account the number of visited phonemes for any path F_1 respectively F_2 and the number of phonemes that may follow the current state. A simplified test can be:

- $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A \geq 0$, $p_1 \geq p_2$ respectively $F_2 \geq F_1$ for the HMMs that skips phonemes.

This test is weaker than the 2^{nd} reduction rule. For example a path is eliminated by a second path if the first one has an inferior confidence measure (higher in value) for the the previous phonemes, a shorter length and the minus of the logarithm of the cumulated posterior in the current phoneme also inferior (higher in value) to that of the second one. An additional confidence measure based on the maximal length, L_{max}, and on the maximum of the minus of the logarithm of the cumulated and normalized posterior in phoneme, P_{max}, can be used in order to limit the number of stored paths.

- $p > L_{max}P_{max}$ in any state

- $\frac{p}{l} > P_{max}$ at the output from a phoneme

where p and l are the values in the current phoneme for the minus of the logarithm of cumulated posterior and for the length of the path that is discarded. These tests allow for the elimination of the paths that are too long without being outstanding, respectively of the paths with phonemes having unacceptable scores, otherwise compensated by very good scores in other phonemes. If $\mathcal{N}$ is chosen equal with one, the aforementioned rules are no longer needed, but always we propagate the path with the maximal current estimation of the confidence measure. The obtained results are very good, even if the defined optimum is guaranteed for this method only when $\mathcal{N}$ is bigger than the length of the sequence allowed by L_{max} or of the tested sequence. The same approach is valid for the simple normalization, where the HMM for the searched word will be grouped into a single phoneme.

The present invention can exploit a newly designed a confidence measure, version named "Real Fitting", that represents differently the exigencies of the recognition. Since the phonemes and the absent states can be modeled by the used HMMs, we find it interesting to request the fitting of each phoneme in the model with a section of the sequence. Therefore, we measure the confidence level of a subsequence as being equal with the maximum over all phonemes of the minus of the logarithm of the cumulated posterior of the phone, normalized with its length:

$$\max_{phonem \in Visited\ Phonems} \frac{\sum_{phonem} - \log(posteriors)}{phonem\ length} \tag{11}$$

The rule that may be used in this framework for the reduction of the number of visited paths is:

- Q_2 is discarded in favor of another path Q_1 if the confidence measure of the Real

Fitting for the previous phonemes is inferior (higher in value) for Q_2 compared with Q_1, and if $p_1 \leq p_2$ and $l_2 \leq l_1$.

where p_1, l_1, respectively p_2, l_2 represent the minus of the logarithm of the cumulated posterior respectively the number of frames in the current phoneme for the path Q_1 respectively Q_2. Similarly to the previous method, the set of visited paths can be pruned by discarding those where:

- $p > L_{max} P_{max}$ in any state
- $\frac{p}{l} > P_{max}$ at the output from a phoneme

where p and l are the values in the current phoneme for the minus of the logarithm of the cumulated posterior and for the length of the path that is discarded. We recall that the meaning of the constants are the maximal length L_{max}, respectively the accepted maxima of the minus of the logarithm of the cumulated and normalized posterior in phoneme, P_{max}.

This invention thus proposes a new method for keyword spotting, based on recent advances in confidence measures, using local posterior probabilities, but without requiring the explicit use of filler models. A new method, referred to as *Iterating Viterbi Decoding (IVD)*, to solve the above optimization problem with a simple DP process (not requiring to store pointers and scores for all possible ending and start times). Other three new beam-search algorithms corresponding to three different confidence measures are also proposed.

To summarize, the object of the invention consists of:

- Method of recognition of a subsequence using a direct maximization of confidence measures.

- The method of IVD for directly maximizing the confidence measures based on simple normalization.

- The use of the confidence measure and method of recognition named 'Real Fitting', based on individual fitting for each phoneme.

- Methods of recognition using simple and double normalization by:

- combining these measures with additional confidence measures mentioned here, respectively the maximal length and real matching limitation.

- The use of the aforementioned methods in keyword recognition.

- The use of the aforementioned methods in subsequence recognition of organic matter.

- The use of the aforementioned methods in recognition of objects in images.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Execution: The method can be performed using a personal computer or can be implemented in specialized hardware.

1. A representation under the form of an HMM is obtained for the subsequences that are looked for (word, protein profile, section of an image of the object).

2. A tool will be obtained (eventually trained Ex: for speech recognition) for the estimation of the posteriors. For example multi-Gaussians, neuronal networks, clusters, database with Generalized Profiles and mutation matrices (PAM, BLOSSUM, etc.).

3. One of the proposed algorithms should be implemented. They yield close performance but the method of Real Fitting coupled with a well checked dictionary should perform best.

   For the first algorithm (IVD)

   (a) The classic algorithm of Viterbi is implemented with the modification that, for each pair $P = \langle sample, state \rangle$ one propagates the time-frame of transition between the state q_G and the states of the HMM M for the path that arrives at P. These are inherited from the path that wins the entrance in the pair P, excepting for the moment when their decision is taken, namely when they receive the index of the corresponding sample.

   (b) $w = -\log P(M|X_b^e)$ is computed by subtracting from the cumulated posterior that is returned by the Viterbi algorithm for the path $Q_{b_t}^{e_t}$, the value $(N - (e_t - b_t + 1)) * \varepsilon_t$ corresponding to the contribution of the states q_G and dividing the result through $e_t - b_t + 1$. $e_t - b_t + 1$ from the previous formula can be factored outside the fraction.

   (c) The initialization of ε is made with an expected mean value. One can use the w that is computed when the state q_G is associated with an emission posterior equal to the average of the best K emission probabilities of the current sample as done in the well-known "garbage on-line model". In this case, K is trained using the corresponding technique.

The next 'Beam search' algorithms, are implemented according to the description in the corresponding sections. For each pair $P = \langle sample, state\rangle$ one computes for each corresponding path the sum and length in the last phoneme, as well as the sum over the normalized cumulated posteriors of the previous phonemes (and their number). Also, the entrance and exit samples into the HMM M are computed and propagated like in the previous method, in order to ensure the localization of the subsequence.

4. If one searched entity (keyword, sequence, object) can have several HMM models, all of them are taken into consideration as competitors. This is the case of the words with several pronunciations (or of the objects that have different structures in different states, for the recognition in images).

After the computation of the confidence measure for each model of the subsequences, one eliminates those with a confidence measure in disagreement with a 'threshold' that is trained for the configuration and the goal of the given application. For example, for speech recognition with neuronal networks and minus of the logarithm of the posteriors, the 'threshold' is chosen in the wanted point of the ROC curve obtained in tests.

5. The remained alternatives are extracted in the order of their confidence measure and with the elimination of the conflicting alternatives until exhaustion. Each time when an alternative is eliminated, the searched entity with the corresponding HMM is re-estimated for the remaining sections in the sequence in which the search is performed. If the new confidence measure passes the test of the 'threshold', then it will be inserted in the position corresponding to its score in the queue of alternatives.

6. The successful alternatives can undergo tests of superior levels like for example a

question of confirmation for speech recognition, opinion of one operator, etc.

7. For objects recognition in images:

Posteriors are obtained by computing a distance between the color of the model and that of element in the section of the image. If the context requires, the image will be preprocessed to ensure a certain normalization (Ex: changeable conditions of light will make necessary a transformation based on the histogram).

The phonemes of the speech recognition correspond to parts of the object. The structure (existence of transitions and their probabilities) can be modified, function of the characteristics detected along the current path. For example, after detecting regions of the object with certain lengths, one can estimate the expected length of the remaining regions. Thus, the number of the expected samples for the future states can be established and the HMM attached to the object will be configured accordingly.

A direction is scanned for the detection of the best fitting and afterwards, other directions will be scanned for discovering new fittings, as well as for testing the previous ones. The final test will be certified by classical methods such as cross-correlation or by the analysis of the contours in the hypothesized position.

To mention some examples for the application of the proposed method:

- The recognition of keywords begins to be used in answering automates of banking system as well as telephone and automates for control, sales or information. The method offers a possibility to recognize keywords in spontaneous speech with multiple speakers.

- The recognition of DNA sequences is important for the study of the human Genome. One of the biggest problem of the involved techniques consists in the high quantity of data that have to be processed.

- The recognition of objects in images is used, among others, in cartography and in the coordination of industrial robots. The method allows a quick estimation of the position of the objects in scenes and can be validated with extra tests, using classical methods of cross-correlation.

WE CLAIM:

1. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 5

2. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 6

3. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 7

4. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 8

5. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 9

6. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 10

7. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 11

8. (canceled) rewritten/re-presented in claim 12

9. (re-presented - formerly independent claim 5) A method of recognizing an observed subsequence as being generated by one of a set of Hidden Markov Models (HMM), characterized by:

- the fact that it searches the subsequence, Q, that offer the minimization of an inverse confidence measure, over all possible matchings,
- where the inverse confidence measure is one of

  1) the accumulated posterior, normalized with the length of the matched subsequence X_b^e (aka. 'simple normalization')

$$\frac{-1}{e-b+1}\log P(Q|X_b^e)$$

2) partitioning the states in a HMM into phonems, having a function Phonemes(Q) that returns the segmentation of a path Q in the HMM into phonems, and computing one of:

2a) the worst average match in a phoneme, called 'real fitting',

$$\underset{Q}{\operatorname{argmin}}\Big(\max_{\mathcal{Q}\in Phonemes(Q)} \frac{\sum_{q^k\in\mathcal{Q}} - \log P(q^k|x_k)}{|\{k|q^k \in \mathcal{Q}\}|}\Big)$$

2b) double normalization of the accumulated posterior over the number of phonemes, J, and over the number of acoustic samples, $e_j - b_j + 1$, where e_j is the time frame where Q enters phoneme j, and b_j is the exit time frame from each phoneme, j,

$$\frac{-1}{J}\sum_{j=1}^{J}\left(\frac{1}{e_j - b_j + 1}\sum_{n=b_j}^{e_j}\log P(q_j^n|x_n)\right)$$

- and allows for the optional revaluation of the alternatives that offer the highest scores of a mentioned confidence measure on the basis of another confidence measure,
- and when based on the confidence measure called 'simple normalization' uses a method that applies Viterbi decoding for a HMM obtained by extending the initial one with a filler state just after start and one just before the termination state, and estimates the emission probability of the filler states in an iterative manner as being equal to the inverse confidence measure in the previous iteration,

and where the emission probability in the filler states in the first iteration can be initialized to any floating point number, but the iteration stops:

i at convergence yielding the estimation of a keyword's boundaries and score as the obtained boundaries and score of non-filler states of the HMM,

ii when the confidence measure descends under a threshold value, T, estimating only the keyword existence,

iii when the emission probability of filler states, ε_0 is initialized with T and is reestimated, as value of ε_1 at the end of the first iteration, to be higher than T deciding keyword inexistence,

- or for any of the three confidence measures: 'simple normalization', 'double normalization' or 'real fitting', uses a beam-search-like algorithm that considers the emission probability of the filler state as zero, computes progressively for each pair of sample and state of HMM a set of possible alternatives paths to reach it, the computation of this set is based on the sets of paths that lead to the states that can be associated to the previous sample and extended with transitions allowed by the analyzed HMM,

  where this set can be reduced by using appropriate (safe) rules for the given confidence measure, ensuring the correctness of the inference,

  and where this set can be also reduced by using heuristics, for speeding up the computation despite the risk of reducing the theoretical quality of the recognition, heuristics of which a fast version stores only the best match,

and for all confidence measures one can prune the set of alternatives with safe rules guaranteeing optimality, where:

- the 'simple normalization' confidence measure with beam-search is used with a safe pruning that discards a path Q_1 given the existence of a path Q_2 whenever $S_2 < S_1$ and $L_1 < L2$, where S_1 and L_1 respectively S_2 and L_2 are the minus of the cumulated log of posteriors along the paths, and the lengths of the paths, for the paths Q_1 respectively Q_2, and which can be optimized by sorting competing paths based on their cost

- the 'double normalization' confidence measure on HMMs where no path skips any phoneme is used with a safe pruning that discards a path Q_1 given the existence of a path Q_2 whenever one of the following tests succeed:

  (a) $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A > 0$, $B \leq 0$ and $L_c^2 A + L_c B + C \geq 0$

  (b) $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A \geq 0$, $B \geq 0$ and $C \geq 0$

  (c) $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A \leq 0$, $C \geq 0$ and $L^2 A + LB + C \geq 0$

  (d) $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A = 0$, $B < 0$ and $LB + C \geq 0$

  where we denote by a_1, p_1, l_1, respectively by a_2, p_2 and l_2 the confidence measure for the previously visited phonemes, the posterior in the current phoneme and the length in the current phoneme for the path Q_1, respectively the path Q_2, and we also use the notations $A = a_1 - a_2$, $B = (a_1 - a_2)(l_1 + l_2) + p_1 - p_2$, C=$(a_1 - a_2)l_1 l_2 + p_1 l_2 - p_2 l_1$, $L = L_{max} - \max\{l_1, l_2\}$, $L_c = -B/2A$ and L_{max} is the maximum acceptable length for a phoneme,

- the 'double normalization' confidence measure on HMMs where some paths skip phonemes is used with a safe pruning that discards a path Q_1 given the existence of a path Q_2 whenever $l_2 \geq l_1$, $A \geq 0$, $p_1 \geq p_2$ respectively $F_2 \geq F_1$, where F_1 respectively F_2 are the number of visited phonemes for paths Q_1 and Q_2,

- the 'real fitting' is used with the safe pruning: Q_2 is discarded in favor of another path Q_1 if the confidence measure of the Real Fitting for the previous phonemes is inferior (higher in value) for Q_2 compared with Q_1, and if $p_1 \leq p_2$ and $l_2 \leq l_1$, where p_1, l_1, respectively p_2, l_2 represent the minus of the logarithm of the cumulated posterior respectively the number of frames in the current phoneme for the path Q_1 respectively Q_2,

- and besides the previously mentioned safe pruning, heuristic prunings are also used for removing paths when $p > L_{max}P_{max}$ in any state or when $\frac{p}{l} > P_{max}$ at the output from a phoneme,

  where p and l are.the values in the current phoneme for the minus of the logarithm of cumulated posterior and for the length of the path that is discarded.

10. (re-presented - formerly dependent claim 6) The method of claim 9, where the method is used to estimate the existence of keywords and their position in utterances, using Hidden Markov Models that model keywords.

11. (re-presented - formerly dependent claim 7) The method of claim 9, where the method is used to estimate the existence of biomolecular subsequences and their position in the chains of DNA using hidden Markov models to model the searched subsequences, and where these models can be obtained by trivial translation from generalized profiles.

12. (re-presented - formerly dependent claim 8) The method of claim 9, where it carries out

the estimation of the existence of objects and their position in images, characterized by the fact that

- it uses models of objects as subsequences represented by Hidden Markov Models,
- namely sections through views of objects are modeled by Hidden Markov Models,
- it uses emission probabilities based on a distance computed between colors, simple distances being yield by a Gaussian with median at the target color, or a normalized inverse of the Euclidean distance in the RGB space,
- wherein the Hidden Markov Models that model the objects can be structured of distinct regions, that play in the frame of the method the role of the phonemes in claim 9,
- and wherein the models of the objects can be modified in a dynamic manner during decoding with respect to the transition properties (existence and probability) on the basis of the so far accumulated information in the process.

8 ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The invention belongs to the technical domain of decoding, classification, alignment and matching of data.

The invention introduces a new method performing tasks in keyword spotting in utterances, detection of subsequences in chains of organic matter (DNA and proteins) and recognition of objects in images. The proposed method searches in an optimized way the matching that maximizes, over all the possible matchings, certain confidence measures based on normalized posteriors. Three such confidence measures are used, two existed in previous work in Speech Recognition, and the third one is a new one.

Application fields for this invention are: man-machine interfaces (using speech recognition; ex: control systems, banking, flight services, etc), coordination systems (for industrial robots and automata) and development systems for pharmaceutic products.